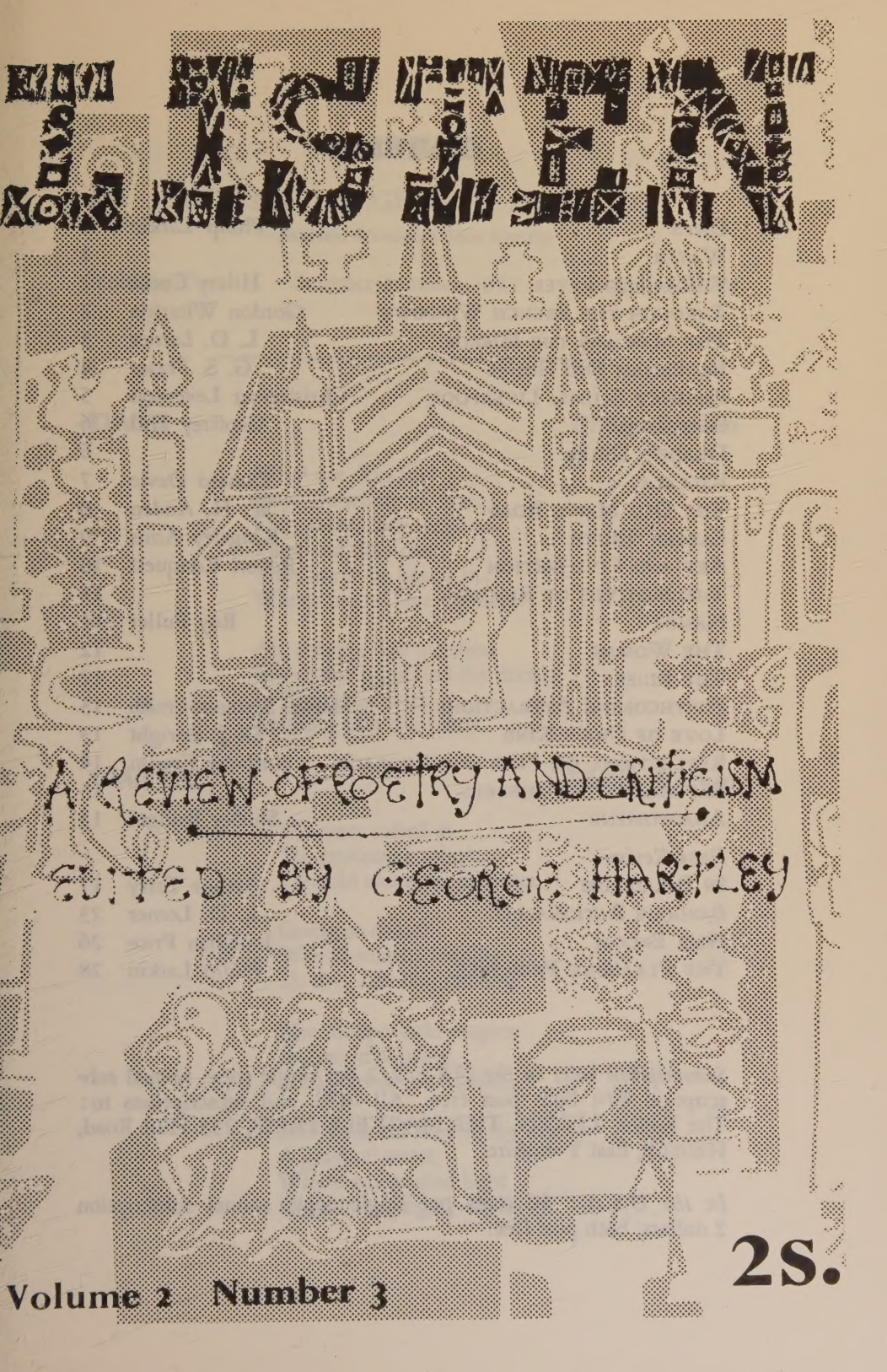
THE STINET
A REVIEW OF POETRY AND CRITICISM
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LISTEN

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DAYS

Philip Larkin

What are days for?
Days are where we live.
They come, they wake us
Time and time over.
They are to be happy in:
Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question
Brings the priest and the doctor
In their long coats
Running over the fields.

WATER

Philip Larkin

If I were called in
To construct a religion
I should make use of water.

Going to church
Would entail a fording
To dry, different clothes;

The litany would employ
Images of sousing,
A furious devout drench,

And I should raise in the east
A glass of water
Where any-angled light
Would congregate endlessly.

THOMAS TO PETER

Hilary Corke

Fair night and soft thief furtive in the loft
Counts the quiet breathing while his fingers rifle
And sleeper turning makes the faint heart stop,
Till golden cock-crow start him from his haunt
To travel dark between the silver hedges,
And will wake Hesperus the morning star
To lead aside his million-prickled dome,
And look! the easter sunrise light him home.

Foul night and stricken sailor in the shrouds
Clinging in storm above its roar to hear
The deeper groan of water upon rock,
Till golden cock-crow on the pitch-thick wind,
Shredded by tempest, faint but acid-clear,
Tells him the land but also dawn is near,
White sun will rise and black sea silent fall
And general day-spring chart out every shoal.

Long night both fair and foul of thief and storm,
Peter, we have sighed through, Peter, have borne
That triple-headed tree denying Him,
Till golden cock-crow turned the two-faced world
Heaven-side upward, O most terrible
And painful to us: but let us arise blithe,
Dress in the dark, and some to prime to pray,
And some to half-lit fields with shouldered scythe!

THROUGH THE FRENCH WINDOWS

Gordon Wharton

You see, Cardea, how they go out of doors,
She to the summer-house, he to the wicket gate,
And turn away gently with perhaps one word.
Over this occasion you cannot preside;
The garden, not the house, produced these spores
Which only in their parting germinate.
When the gate shuts it scares away a bird,
An incident all your squeaking cannot elide.

And crucial flowers will detain this second
Always, where clever mirrors would give it distance:
They could not bear those glances at the table,
Cluttered with remonstrances that hurt,
Preferred the garden that makes parting fecund
And memory delicious. No insistence
On reality can spoil their fable
Which has no moral to take root in dirt.

So gardens, ideally, are those gentle places
People are lost in; she will always return,
Smiling at her graceful, preposterous moment,
To the summer-house steps, striking just this pose,
Head slightly bent, a proffered hand that effaces
The lily's poise. And he will have to learn,
In public gardens, soft aches that flowers foment
And turn on his heel before the park gates close.

THE MAN AND THE MIRROR L. D. Lerner

You. Out there. You who reflect and stare,
Knotting your puzzled gaze to my asking eyes,
And echo my silent questions without replies,
Answer these thoughts that you share.

I cannot answer. I can only wait
And feel you flatter as you scan my face.
Within your eyes the disappointments start:
You did not know that flattery would place
You and its smiling object so apart;
You did not know that flattery turns to hate.
So now my hated face looks from the glass;
You know the truth, have seen me, and can pass
To looking at yourself.

It is not true.
I see myself the same as I see you.
All that is yours is mine, except your wish
To know the cause of my authority.
All that is mine is yours, save only this:
I am looked up to, you look up to me.
Confess that all you've ever wished to be
(You know it now) is what you see.

There's one thing left that I can do:
You've shattered me, but I can shatter you.

The image gave a kind of grin,
And broke, and let distraction in.

But then the gazer could not bear
The unreflecting empty air:
Remembering what he had been shown
He saw — at last — himself alone.
Hoping thereby to insulate
The world from him, himself from hate,
He shut his angry eyes and swore,
And seized the broken glass and tore
His flesh till he could see no more.

BROCKHAM END HOUSE — G. S. Fraser

(For George and Olga Lawrence.)

'Lawrence, of virtuous father, virtuous son . . .'
Putative ancestor! The proved one's bust
Stands in your hall, a long, bleak, bony face
That suits with marble: 'Here lies Henry Lawrence
Who tried to do his duty.' In the long
Unlighted corridor I explore your books:
Here, on a shelf, an Empire's rise and fall:
Lawrence and Havelock: Heroic Lives.
Dust on *The Chronicles of Dustypore.*

How far away their palm, their dust, their heat.
That race is run. And here, so close to Bath,
The little hills that 'run into your face'
(So Horace Walpole, in a petulant phrase,
But the hills' race is endless, after all)
Shut in a steep demesne of woods and pasture
Where the forget-me-nots among the nettles,
The low clouds gathering on the view of Bristol,
The fair and feathery pencilling of swayed trees,
Work with sheep's morning meh, with the rooks' cawing,
An unidentified bird on a cherry tree
That sounds like a baby's rattle, to beguile
Anxiety to verdurous repose
Where poems can spring up like early cowslips
On morning walks through woodlands in the wind.
George, you cut trees, then sit translating Tocqueville

While on the sunny dapple of your lawn
Your tame white rabbit chases Chinese geese.
London lies far in purgatorial smoke,
Your pen moves on, you fill your mug with cider,
And it seems heaven up on your high ridge.

And John and Henry Lawrence, too, in India,
In that crisp landscape baking biscuit brown,
In tent, on horseback, watching violence brewing,
Trying to do their duty, sometimes also
Must have remembered such green English landscapes:
As Henrietta Lawrence pined for lough sides
And for the wild Atlantic Irish coast.
Calm Tocqueville in his house in Normandy,
Among such peace as yours, could also see
What moves and stirs the riders in the dust:
It is the image of the green day dying
That energises runners in the heat.

REGENCY SLUMS, LIVERPOOL

Christopher Levenson

'To be Humbled' as bed-sitters, the tall rooms stand
Nostalgically aloof, while torn lace curtains
Like cobwebs cover a shameful nakedness
That two doors on is shrunk to a skeleton.
There, sheathed in silver light, cranes stride,
Dislodging the parapet, crude buckets plunge to dredge
The last vestige of virtue from an heirloom
Too ornate in this winter, in a hard time.
For look where on the ceiling or crumbling portico
Cherubs flounder through gilt frameworks we have wrecked
Merely by disbelief.
Now remaindered and fenced by hoardings, going cheap,
Contractors cart off the debris, stack the fresh timber
Between a maze of pedestals, melting down all false love.

Yet handle even these stones with reverence;
Before we dismember their certain charm, take care.
Such slender grace grew strong on certainty
And walls that hold now no colours but the sunset's
Rose unequivocal once into a clearer sky.
Though the mortar crack, the façade falls away,
On these foundations, bound to the black soil by weeds,
Empires were built we should not disremember.

So the old order, the decayed dignity
Must somehow be restored, and a new grandeur born
New statements attempted; but while the words are shaping
Better to leave the site bare for a while
Than build again too soon and out of keeping.
For who in this age shall found a new style?

SCAPEGOAT — Geoffrey Hill

Through scant pride to be so put out!
But feed, feed, unlyrical scapegoat;
Plague shrines where each fissure blows
Odour of laurel clouding yours!

Exercise, loftily, your visions
Where the mountainous distance
Echoes its unfaltering speech
To mere outcry and harrowing search.

Possessed of agility and passion,
Energy (out-of-town-fashion)
Attack every obstacle
And height; make the sun your pedestal.

Settle all that bad blood;
Be visited, touched, understood;
Be graced, groomed, returned to favour
With admirable restraint and fervour!

DRAKE'S DRUM — Geoffrey Hill

Those varied dead! The undiscerning sea
Shelves and dissolves their flesh as it burns spray

Who do not shriek like gulls nor dolphins ride
Crouched under spume to England's erect side

Though there a soaked sleeve lolls or shoe patrols
Tide-padded thick shallows, squats in choked pools

Neither our designed wreaths nor used words
Sink to their melted ears and melted hearts.

KILLALA* — Donald Davie

Forlorn indeed Hope on these shores,
White-breeched, under a tricorne, shouting orders
Into the wind in a European language
La gloire against the Atlantic.
And Enniscrone,
The unfocussed village carefully grouped on absence . . .

Laden with Europe, toiling up out of the sea
With all the baggage of their own and Europe's
History barnacled, clammy with tawny jellies
And spotted silts, the wreck
Of unwashed hope is a more combustible flotsam
Than this more stranded,
More featureless than any conurbation.

Not memory (her lading) nor the vessel
— No, nor the vessel, for the Temeraire
Has been a dozen ships and all one venture —
But the venture persists. Such a temerity,
So bare a chance deserves a barer rock's
Less cluttered landfall. Nakedness
Is structural, asks a binnacle at sea;
By land, if not an oak, a standing stone
Hewn or unhewn in an open place, for the venture
To take a shape by. But the prudent Gael,
Disguised on the skyline as habitation tatters
A scarecrow coast, has blurred identity
By blurring shape, a flutter of rags in the wind.

Frenchman, the beacons flare acróss the Midlands.
Stopping the car and hating this ugly place,
Let this be as if I had lit the first of the beacons,
Of driftwood fetched from the shore,
Announcing your identity and presence:
Not an idea, abstract notion, quality
But a being only, able for life and action,
The same it was some time ago, in France.

**Killala*: where the French landed in Ireland in 1798.

THE OLD MAN'S ROAD — W. H. Auden

Across the Great Schism, through our whole landscape,
Ignoring God's Vicar and God's Ape,

Under their noses, unsuspected,
The Old Man's Road runs as it did

When a light subsoil, a simple ore,
Were still in vogue: true to His wherefore,

By stiles, hedge-gaps it goes,
Over ploughland, woodland, cow meadows,

Past shrines to a cosmological myth
No heretic today would be caught dead with,

Near hilltop rings that were so safe then,
Now stormed easily by small children,

(Shepherds use bits in the high mountains,
Hamlets take stretches for Lovers Lanes)

Then through cities threads its odd way,
Now without gutters, a Thieves Alley,

Now with green lampposts and white curb,
The smart Crescent of a high-toned suburb,

Giving wide berth to an old cathedral,
Running smack through a new Town Hall,

Unlookable for, by logic, by guess,
Yet some strike it and are struck fearless.

No life can know, but no life
That sticks to its course can be made captive,

And who wanders with it are not stopped at
Borders by guards of a Theocrat,

Crossing the pass so almost where
His searchlight squints but no closer

(And no farther where it might by chance):
So in summer sometimes, without hindrance,

Apotropaically scowling, a tinker
Shuffles past, in the waning year

Potters a coleopterist, poking
Through yellow leaves, and a youth in spring

Trots by after a new excitement,
His true self, hot on the scent.

The Old Man leaves his road to those
Who love it no less since it lost purpose,

Who never ask what History is up to,
So cannot act as if they knew:

Assuming a freedom its Powers deny,
Denying its Powers, they pass freely.

LARGER TRUTH — Kingsley Amis

Round Fforestfach, Llansamlet and elsewhere
Some people (it being half-past five)
Are going home from work, or whatever they do,
    Or wherever they live.

Others work at night, or are still working
At more different things than I could name,
Or work further away; wherever I stood ...
    I shouldn't see any of them.

It takes a novelist to say *In Swansea*
(Just show us on the map) *people* (all right)
Were (as one man?) *packing up work* (one kind?)
    And going home (one street?).

Don't plead it's shorthand: he's not through yet.
He sardine-cans us but he plots too,
Merrily tabulating what we're up to
    And what we think we're up to,

(That is our *donnée*, as it were, *mon bon*,
That complex, perennially fascinating)
As if they were separate, or as if we thought
We were up to anything.

Yawning, smoking, dozing, chatting, staring,
Waiting for something, feeling a bit queasy,
He gives a meaning to, or says there's none:
Plotting again, you see.

It takes a poet to go one stage further,
To pick stuff like this for his harangue,
To pretend that giving or denying meaning
Means anything.

ART AND CIVILIZATION — Robert Conquest

Where a safe hearth glows warm
The kitten shows its claws
Bloody from some small mouse,
Smug to the shocked applause
Of the milk-providing house.
Outside roars the monstrous storm.

Deep in the wilderness
The huge beasts of the dark
Are killed with hard-won craft.
The loudest challengers
Rave down a panic track.
The hunter's tread is soft.

What blows the crude clubs deal,
(Swung with blood-curdling shrieks),
Bruise, numb, but cannot kill.
And only cool techniques
Can forge the blue-sheened steel
And train the sword-arm's skill.

The weapons that flash light
Glitter like swooping birds.
Blood rises to their touch;
Yet they too but excite
The anger's screaming chords
And speed the talons' slash.

Shaking the earth in its rage
The monster roars through the glade;
Coolness, to meet its charge,
Needs a strong weapon's aid;
And clarity is but an edge
To the great weighted blade.

THE MOTIVES OF RHYTHM — Robert Conquest

A poet's faults: some are his own
In writing or in passing what he writes;
But some are reader-carried parasites
In false agreement on perfection's tone.

He trusts the niggling metre to repeat
Clotted incomprehensibles that seem
— (To him) — a phrase from some electric dream,
Or the forced images — gold, ice and wheat.

Yet just as verse may ride the gnomic thrust
Or incredible illuminations of
Dusk, there is roughness must not halt its stride:

And when perfection fails him, as it must,
The blinded poet who balks at stammering love
Stamps on through slapdash rhythms of fate or pride.

NAMES — Roy Fuller

A skein of suns, the uncut stones of night,
Calm planets rising, violet, golden, red —
Bear names evolved from man's enormous head:
Of gods who govern battle, rivers, flight,
And goddesses of science and delight;
Arranged in the mortal shapes of those who bled
To found a dynasty or in great dread
Slept with their destiny, full-breasted, white.

But long before stout Venus, clanking Mars,
What appellations had the eternal stars?
When, cheek by jowl with burial pits, rank dens
Lay open to the dark, and dwarfish men
Stared under huge brow-ridges, wits awry,
What fearful monsters slouched about the sky?

THE WOMAN

Roy Fuller

The legendary woman he had sought,
Whose name had been as threadbare and remote
As God's, whose fatal loveliness was taught
With participle, peak and asymptote,

Now lay below him smiling past his gaze;
The breasts a little flaccid on their cage
Of ribs, her belly's skin as speckled as
A flower's throat. She had been caught by age.

And he could see that even in the past
The pillars that enclosed the myth concealed
A slippery stinking altar and a vast
Horde of lewd priests to whom all was revealed.

Yet she was fair still, and he cried out in vain
To reach and own her far complacent fane.

THE RIDERS

Roy Fuller

There actually stood the fabled riders,
Their faces, to be truthful, far from white;
Their tongues incomprehensible, their height
Negligible: in a word, complete outsiders.

Why had they come, To wonder at the tarts,
Trade smelly hides, gawp at the statuary,
Copy our straddling posture and our arts?
How right that we had not thought fit to flee!

'Join us at cocktails, bathing?' No reply.
'Let's see your wild dances, hear your simple airs.'
No move save the shifting of a shifty eye.

Trailing great pizzles, their dun stallions
Huddled against the hedges while our mares
Cavorted on the grass, black, yellow, bronze.

FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS

Martin Seymour-Smith

How few are not possessed by private joy
When guns appear, like magic, in the hero's hands;
And mourn the bristly villain's duty to destroy
The nobler killer of the bright bad lands
Who, better groomed, his evil better understands.

Is this a wish to have correct careening?
Or does ashamed excitement really hide
A subtler facet of the story's meaning?
Do you not find yourself identified
More with the wicked than the righteous side?

The Macbeth type, who has an evil seed,
Avoids the sadness of life-sentence, or the rope
(His social end both censor and your pleasure need)
By dying in self-sacrifice on some sheer slope:
Abandoning his natural but wrong-minded hope

He thrusts himself in front of child and wife,
Falls, victim to a gun that never missed.
Like you when plunging into normal life
Drilled full of holes by your psychiatrist,
Your unfired gun clenched threatening in your fist.

And he who killed you without caring,
That simpler villain, fate, dies drunk and swearing.
But will come back next week, and yet more daring.

LOVE OF ONE'S KIND

D. J. Enright

How fine and frail the pivot
    where this great mass must rest!

Love the Arabs, hate the Jews?
Every day a trial, every dream a test:
A trivial kitten crying from a drain —
    and all could fall —
Or under callous clogs that bruise
    you in a crowded train.

Too many handsome trees will make a jungle,
Massed people cannot help but seem a mob;
And every hour brings forth its tangle
of disturbing little hates.

And yet,
Outside the weight of settled cynicism,
Outside some tyranny's cement —
than this, what firmer basis can we find?

For, after all, this feeble pivot gains
an unexpected strength —
When all these crimes and carelessness are in
my heart, my mind.
Not hard to love, if you but use your brains.

REFLECTIONS ON FEAR AND COURAGE

Anthony Cronin

I
How can we feel our courage from our fear
When the baffling god who is not now nor here

But sees our life's map in the futures round
(As even the dead may see from the rising ground)
Tries us by failure until, failure found,

Our nature which is formed by faliure tries
No longer to compete in others' lies?

Granted the courage that the length of days
Imposes on the average. Grant also praise
And self-esteem. Remember that the ways

In which men prove or murder love are queer.
If no one else must face it that is fear.

II
Courage takes different forms.
Proust stayed in bed,
Emily Dickinson at home.
Hawthorne stood on his head.

For his unpublished shame
Stevenson asked the Lord's
Pardon. Perhaps our shame
Is only lack of words.

Unpublished courage
And unpublished shame,
Mere differences
Become the same.

III
Anyway take this for granted, that greyhead there you'll find,
Thinking courage a choice, had neither hand nor mind.
A man comes to his courage through feelings by fear refined:
Confronted one day by a question and in panic striking blind
Will find his peace and answer but not leave fear behind.

BAUDELAIRE IN BRUSSELS Anthony Cronin

Gas-lamps abandoned by the night burn on
Grotesquely as the daylight stirs the street,
And pain as bright as dawn behind the eyes
Is pulsing as the wings of madness beat.
The archetype prays to Poe to pray to God
For time to pay his debts and die of peace:
No mind can hold too many truths at once.
All contradictions cry out for release.
All contradictions: nothing equals pride
Except our hatred for ourselves: too late
God punishes in the person of his mother
One who endured before he chose his fate.

ANADYOMENE Shirley Bridges

The sun caresses hotly on these sands
Embalmed in weeks of relaxation
The waves stroke daily smoother round the bay;

New Eden, or Olympia, for display
Of every youthful conformation
Eye can desire, or body understands,

And all so gold, clothed with the sun's own strands,
Shining sweet dissimulation
Wearing the sun's skin, without shade, by day:

(By night brown bodies must be put away,
That painted nakedness temptation
In the dark, unknown while the sun stands

Lord in the sky). So hot. Come now, take hands
One of you; differentiation
In shape or colour, not in longing, lay

For all are mine by right of open eye
Without a further implication
Of claim to seize love's secret contrabands;

But mermaid, yes you: eyes meet — (lands
Of northmen lack this exaltation) —
It shall be you I touch; you smell of sea

And sand is in your hair, roll over me
To alternate this dissipation
Of rubbing skin to skin on granite sands,

All gold the softness my eyes touch, but hands
Following curves to crystallisation
Find snowdrifts, those too, mermaid, I must see.

I taste hot rapture now, your heat for me
The breath of summer's consummation;
Kiss me, for soon storms bring into the bay

All winter's cloaks and fears; in long dismay
A middle age of contemplation
Drives golden boys and girls from pagan sands.

IN PARADISUM

Section: Rock-Drill, 85-95 de los cantares, Ezra Pound. (Faber, 12/6.)

'To hell with cookie-pushers who think poetry is a bun shop and are busy making éclairs.' This quotation, which appears on the jacket of the American edition of the latest *Cantos,* has not been transferred to the English one. This seems a pity, for as much as anything between the covers this is the true voice of Pound — the voice which growls, not unamiably, from so many of the letters. ('Sure everybody knows Barny Barnato was a better motor racing driver than Dante.') What's more, these words show that Pound is still prepared to give lessons to other poets, as he has done on and off for the last forty years. That this has been one of Pound's major contributions to modern letters no one, I imagine, will dispute; yet very often this claim is made only by side-stepping the *Cantos* and concentrating on other aspects of Pound's career. The sort of activity summed-up in the phrase 'Make it New' is so evident and so clearly-stated in Pound's critical writings that it is all too easy to regard these as the last word on the matter. Yet the kind of distortion which comes from turning individual *aperçus* into critical concepts is one of the things which Pound himself is most concerned to avoid. A great deal of Pound's criticism, one soon realizes, consists of practical advice to be applied in particular circumstances — a kind of criticism, in fact, which is all too rarely brought into the open. The value of such criticism is that it directs one's attention from the author to the text, though the technical nature of the comment is often of the kind which escapes the professional critic. If it has a general aim, it is simply to sharpen the reader's perceptions, never to set one kind of critical view against another.

So much is generally admitted: what is less clearly seen is the way in which the same approach is at work in the *Cantos.* Of course, the difference in complexity is immense, and to see the same problem in a context as massive as the *Cantos* is a task of an altogether different order. Yet in a very real sense, the viewpoint of the criticism is also the central notion of the poem: so much so that we can hardly hope to understand the one without the other.

The first question which has to be asked, then, is: just what sort of advice does Pound offer to other poets? For much of the *Cantos* is concerned with 'ideas in action' — not with stating fixed beliefs in an abstract way, but with making the reader 'feel' certain ideas as they emerge from concrete situations. Here the operative word is 'concrete'. If Pound has any lesson to teach, then the *Cantos* are his way of teaching it. Put in the simplest terms, the whole drift of the *Cantos* (and how much of their detail is involved in this!) is anti-conceptual. If they have a structure, then this, to a very great extent, is what determines it; if Pound is attempting to use language in a different way, this, again, is the

reason. 'Pound the technician stripping the fat from an image and the slither from a rhythm,' writes Mr Kenner, 'is coterminous with Pound the Confucian intent on defining a moral principle so sharply that it can be seized in the fist and used.' Whatever one's opinion of Pound, the unity of his poetical and moral interests is beyond doubt, and I shan't insist on it. As far as the poem itself is concerned, the main thing is to see to what extent its nature has been decided by Pound's emphasis on the concrete.

Here, the obvious starting-point is Imagism. More than one critic has pointed out how certain Imagist principles continue to function in the *Cantos*: the insistence on cadence and clarity of representation is still a major part of Pound's technique. What separates the *Cantos* from the earlier verse is the attempt to overcome the static tendencies of Imagism — to find some way of presenting objects in motion, though without loss of clarity. Whether or not Pound has successfully achieved this is open to question; the fact that a recent critic is able to refer to the *Cantos* as 'a set of vivid icons' suggests that he hasn't. But it's clear that this is what Pound intended and that he has worked very hard indeed to bring it about.

A great deal has been written on the methods which Pound uses to achieve this. The question of 'presentation' is, of course, fundamental, and the fact that it is should tell us something about the kind of substance presented. Inasmuch as the *Cantos* have an identifiable moral content, it consists of a series of distinctions between right and wrong ways of acting which conflict at various stages of civilization. For Pound it is not enough to *state* these various ways: the important thing is to bring them to life in such a way that the reader will be directly involved. Evil is identified with usury; against it are set the various exemplars familiar to readers of the poem: Confucius, Sigismondo Malatesta, John Adams and so on, all of whom represent 'right' modes of thought and — more important — of action. Here one sees Pound's desire for the concrete at work in shifting the emphasis from general ideas to actual illustrations. And the way in which these illustrations are worked out in the body of the poem — the use of contemporary documents in the Malatesta cantos, for example — is intended to give the reader the 'feel' of acting in a certain way in a particular set of circumstances. In this way one of the common objections to the Cantos is removed: if the account of an individual — Malatesta or Adams — is made to seem a mass of confusion, it is because historical action is like that; good conduct has to make itself felt amidst a great many contradictions. In the strictest sense, the reader is called on to 'imitate' the situations which Pound chooses to develop. Each of these situations is made to interact on the others; Pound deliberately avoids any temptation to draw conclusions.

But is this true of the reader? If it isn't, then Pound would say we have read his poem badly. Even so, and despite all the obstacles Pound puts in our way, I doubt whether it is possible to read through the *Cantos* without introducing one's own ideas of order — that is to say, without re-entering the world of concept. In fact, in the later cantos, as I shall

try to show, Pound seems to realize this contradiction himself, and to be deliberately offering us concepts of his own.

A similar kind of objection can be made to Pound's use of the ideogram. His debt to Fenollosa's study of the Chinese written character is too well-known to need elaboration. Briefly, Pound's notion of the ideogram as the concrete representation of actual objects becomes the justification for the technical experiments of the *Cantos*. 'The use of material images to suggest immaterial relations' (Fenollosa), is, of course, one of the traditional resources of poetry, though no one has driven it as hard as Pound — driven it, in fact, to the point where it may bring about a positive failure in communication. This is not to underestimate Pound's achievement here: if it accounts for much of the opaqueness of the *Cantos*, it also lies behind some of their most conspicuous successes, in particular, the economy with which a single word is made to evoke a complex series of responses. The objection lies, not in the incidental successes, of which there are many, but in the impossible attempt to free words of stock responses by severing them completely from their roots and traditions. The peculiar nature of thought within any language — and English is no exception — is conditioned by a vast number of factors within the language itself, and to write as if this were not important is to risk disaster.

On the question of the structure of the *Cantos*, nearly everything must be left unsaid. Emphasis on Pound the craftsman has often had the effect of excluding almost everything else in the *Cantos*. For an extreme example of this I quote Mr Blackmur: 'Mr Pound is explicit; he is all surface and articulation . . . the difficulties of the *Cantos* are superficial and their valuable qualities are all qualities or virtues of a well managed surface . . .'. These words, it is only fair to say, were written in 1933, though the argument they contain still persists in some quarters. Since then we have had Mr Kenner's book, in which a good deal, if not all, is made plain. Mr Kenner's analysis of the structure, brilliant as it is, is perhaps *too* explicit; the structure he reveals so clearly is there, beyond any doubt, but to be apprehended by association and intuition rather than brought right to the surface. But at least it is no longer possible to conceive the poem merely as 'rambling talk'. As anyone who has read them knows, the *Cantos*, as well as being anti-conceptual, are anti-dramatic. Just as objects lose their 'quidditas' by being made into concepts, so, on Pound's view, the normal structure of flow and climax is again a falsification.

What I want to stress here, however — and this is particularly relevant to the latest cantos — is the existence of certain 'modes' (I use Mr Kenner's term) which, fragmentary as they are in the earlier cantos, are becoming increasingly urgent in the later ones. It is here that the poem touches the scheme of the *Divine Comedy*. Hell, Purgatory and (we are beginning to see) Paradise all have their counterparts in the *Cantos*. T. S. Eliot's remark about Pound's hell only existing for other people is well known, but it shouldn't blind one to the fact that much of the early cantos is concerned with 'infernal' modes, from Odysseus' descent to the

underworld to the political irresponsibility of modern Europe. In Cantos 31-71 the account of Jeffersonian democracy represents a purgatorial movement — what Pound calls a ' direction of the will ' — without parallel in recent times.

One may object that Pound's vision of Hell is too simple: in a poem which is so concerned with good and evil, there are remarkably few gradations between the two. This much, I think, is fair; but when one comes to the *Pisan Cantos,* with their hints of a *Paradiso,* one is aware of a difference which is not entirely to be explained by the pressure of external circumstances. These are present, certainly, in the sense of strain and the increasing importance of memory; but the total effect can only be gauged in relation to the earlier part of the poem. It is tempting to speak here of a ' progression ', but this would be pressing the analogy with Dante too far. As it is, there is a version of Paradise as early as Canto 16:

> and by their fountains, the heroes,
> Sigismundo, and Malatesta Novello,
> and founders, gazing at the mounts of their cities.

But this vision of the Elysian Fields is at once simpler and more literary than the notion which begins to evolve in the *Pisan Cantos.* Here the guiding principles are the affirmation of inner values and the recognition of intelligible forms:

> quand vos venetz al som de l'escalina
> (ethos) gradations
> These are distinctions in clarity
> ming . . . these are distinctions

This brings me to the latest cantos. Perhaps it hardly needs to be said that these new poems won't gain any fresh readers for Pound. They contain few of the more immediate qualities of the *Pisan Cantos,* and are as elliptical as anything Pound has so far written. Moreover, several of them involve a knowledge of unfamiliar sources: the Chinese history-classic, the Chou King; T. H. Benton's *Thirty Years' View,* a contemporary account of American politics at the time of the Bank War (Arthur Schlesinger's *The Age of Jackson* is useful here); and the Life of Apollonius of Tyana, the Pythagorean philosopher, by Philostratus. (The point about Apollonius, as far as I know, is that his travels brought him into contact with Oriental religions. Hence he provides Pound with a convenient bridge between civilizations.)

The title of the section — Rock-Drill — is not explained, though the phrase is used more than once in the text. It suggests the austerity of precepts; at any rate, this is what we get, especially in Cantos 85-89. Canto 85 (and to a lesser extent 86) plunges us back into the world of Confucian principles. Roughly speaking, it reaffirms, in a more schematic way, certain ideas which are scattered through the early parts of the poem: sensibility, peace, natural process, *techne,* awareness. As before, these ideas are opposed to examples of corruption: the irresponsible use of power by Disraeli and Bismarck, the Whig interpretation of history and so on. The emphasis here is on self-discipline as a preparation for

the moral life. Most of the time the idea of a paradise is only latent; where a divine purpose is acknowledged it is in strictly untranscendental terms: 'Gentlemen from the West, / Heaven's process is quite coherent / and its main points perfectly clear'.

Cantos 87-89 deal mainly with episodes from the Bank War ('Bellum cano perenne'), interwoven with examples of 'right action'. Several key-phrases recur here: 'directio voluntatis', 'semina motuum' (cf. 'slowness is beauty'), and Mussolini's question: 'Why do you want to set your ideas in order?' Two new notions appear at this stage. First, the neo-Platonic doctrine of 'signatures' — the identical form preserved from one generation of natural objects to another:

> . . . In nature are signatures
> needing no verbal tradition,
> oak leaf never plane leaf.

This is bound up with the more general Platonic distinction between eternal forms and their temporal manifestations, in turn related to Pound's conception of ideas which are embodied and re-embodied at certain points in history, though they may be submerged at others. Secondly, one notes the appearance in Canto 87 of certain allusions to light and vision: 'Y Yin, Ocellus, Erigena: / "All things are lights"'; 'Monsieur F. saw his mentor / composed wholly of light'). I don't think one sees the full significance of this until Cantos 90 and 91; again, this is an example of the way Pound makes his readers *feel* the struggle towards clarity.

Canto 90 brings an obvious change of tone, a lyrical movement which leads into the following canto. Here the key-phrase is 'Ubi amor ibi oculus' — love as the begetter of vision. In the opening lines, the stress is on 'process': 'Beatific spirits welding together / as in one ash-tree in Ygdrasail' (Pound's heaven must include the chthonic forces); 'templum aedificans, not yet marble'. This is important, I think, because it supports one of Pound's main intentions: the attempt to suggest the movement of the mind while ideas are still in formation. Later the poem moves towards the idea of personal renewal echoed by renewal in nature. The light imagery reappears ('but the light perpendicular, upward . . .') and is linked with other images of ascension and creation:

> to new forest,
> thick smoke, purple, rising
> bright flame now on the altar
> the crystal funnel of air
> out of Erebus, the delivered,
> Tyro, Alcmene, free now, ascending
> e i cavalieri,
> ascending,
> no shades more,
> lights among them, enkindled,
> and the dark shade of courage . . .

The canto which follows (91) is at once the most complex and the most achieved of the series. (It has recently been analysed with great skill by Donald Davie in *Irish Writing*, no. 36.) Here the Platonic doctrine of

eternal form (the 'reina' of the following passage) is made explicit:

that the body of light come forth
from the body of fire
And that your eyes come to the surface
from the deep wherein they were sunken,
Reina — for 300 years,
and now sunken
That your eyes come forth from their caves
& light then
as the holly-leaf
qui laborat, orat
Thus Undine came to the rock,
by Circeo
and the stone eyes again looking seaward

The image of the eyes under water corresponds exactly to Pound's view of the tradition which may be submerged, but never lost; the tone of the passage implies a prayer for its restoration.

One other aspect of this canto should be mentioned: the use of the sun as an image containing both fertility and clarity. The Confucian reference is strong here — if Pound is working towards a celestial order, then it is one which demands the union of both these qualities. (Cf. Canto 87: 'Who leave the sun out of . . . religion? with no dancing girls at the altar?') But Confucius is not the only influence at work: Dante and Cavalcanti, as Pound is well aware, admit sexual passion to the highest level of vision; in Canto 90, the phrase 'libidinis expers' is referred to Ocellus, the Pythagorean philosopher.

This leads us directly to the kind of vision which Pound has in mind in these cantos, and here it is more useful to group the remaining poems together and concentrate on one key-passage. Canto 94 picks up references to John Adams and then expands into the following:

Beyond civic order:
l'AMOR.
Was it Frate Egidio — 'per la mente'
looking down and reproving
'who shd/ mistake the eye for the mind'.
Above prana, the light,
past light, the crystal.
Above crystal, the jade!

Here there can be no doubt that Pound is offering us a hierarchy involving various kinds of activity, none of which excludes the others. Above civic order, represented by Adams, comes the activity of love; next, light, and above that the crystal (the central symbol of Canto 91 — the restoration of eternal form), and finally, in the highest position of all, the 'jade'. By his use of the word 'prana', which in the Upanishads stands for the senses, Pound makes it quite clear that by love he means sexual passion. Above this comes light, involving a still higher form of vision; beyond this, the crystal, or the realization of eternal form, and

lastly the jade. What is meant by this is still to be made clear, but at least it suggests a Confucian context.

So much for Pound's tentative approach to a *Paradiso*. Some will think it very tentative indeed; the cantos which are still to come will show whether or not they are right. But whatever the final shape of the *Cantos*, one can't help but admire the sincerity and single-mindedness of these latest poems. Amidst all the complexities there are times when Pound seems to flinch under his self-imposed task, and at these moments the emotion comes out as true as anything in the poem:

> J'ai eu pitié des autres.
> Pas assez! Pas assez!
> For me nothing. But that the child
> walk in peace in her basilica,
> The light there almost solid.

At such moments one is in the presence of a human being at the full stretch of his powers, emotional and intellectual — a rare thing these days, at least in literature.

Arthur Terry

BAROQUE RATIONALIST

The Descent into the Cave, and Other Poems, James Kirkup. (O.U.P., 12/6.)
Poems 1943-1956, by Richard Wilbur. (Faber and Faber, 15/-.)

I HAVE never thought James Kirkup has any poetic talent at all, and *The Descent into the Cave* has not caused me to change my mind. The title poem may well have made an exciting radio programme because of its subject-matter; few of us can resist the lure of speleology. Mr Kirkup had a rare old time on his expedition down the Mendip Caves, and his narrative is most exciting, but there is not a memorable line in the poem: I would sooner have had it all in prose. It reads as if he deliberately chose to write a poem about caves. He is very good at choosing subjects for poems, and I feel quite jealous of his ingenuity: in this volume he writes on a kitchen sink, a pair of old trousers, football action photographs, and even a public convenience: but never do I feel that a subject chose him. For a neat object lesson in the difference between poems written from the mind's surface and those written with the whole mind, I recommend anyone to compare Mr Kirkup's pious and worthy stanzas on the Hiroshima panels with the moving irony of Mr D. J. Enright's recent 'Monuments of Hiroshima'.

I come now to Richard Wilbur, and I must say at once that I am not yet ready to discuss his poems. Like most English readers, I knew his work only through anthologies, and I am still reeling at the technical mastery of these 136 dazzling pages. There is not a bad or incompetent poem in the book: those splendidly accomplished poems of his that we have already seen — *Beasts, Still Citizen Sparrow, Death of a Toad* —

turn out to be not just flashes in the pan, but quite typical. Mr Wilbur can do anything with words. He can find the happy adjective that is not too obviously happy: his camels 'move with a stilted stride', his driftwood is 'with the gnarled swerve and tangle of tides finely involved'. Rhyme, half-rhyme, metre, are perfect, or deliberately flawed. He can make an etymological pun with a real Miltonic delight:

> Now winter downs the dying of the year,
> And night is all a settlement of snow.

I should say that Mr Wilbur is the most gifted poet now writing in English. This does not mean of course that he is the best: the great English poets have not often been those who could 'do anything'. When it comes to discussing the view of life that these poems embody, I can speak only tentatively: since I have not known them long enough, and since he is only 36 (though I must add that the later poems show no particular advance over the earlier.) Further, everyone to some extent speaks for himself in evaluating a poet's attitudes, and I ought to admit that Mr Wilbur's are especially congenial to me. With all these qualifications, I suggest that he is not merely an accomplished minor poet, but a figure of real importance.

He is a naturalist, and a baroque rationalist. 'Naturalist' in the sense that he glorifies natural experiences, refusing to repudiate them for the sake of the supernatural: *Love calls us to the things of this world* is one of his titles. Religious experiences are real, but as a metaphor of the life of the senses. A vision of angels is caused by a glimpse of washing in the wind during a mood of uplift; the woman who has scrubbed the church for seventeen years has 'seen no visions but the thing done right', but all the same

> Sometimes the early sun
> Shines as she flings the scrubwater out, with a crash
> Of grimy rainbows, and the stained suds flash
>
> Like angel-feathers.

He immerses himself in the intensity of physical experience with a completeness that one sometimes wants to call 'negative capability'. He seems most attached to the hard clear sights of a summer landscape in Mediterranean light, and salutes the fullness of nature in this with the touch of Keats:

> — the grass
> Mashes under the foot, and all is full
> Of heat and juice and a heavy jammed excess.

One is not surprised to find him translating Valéry.

Parallel to his love of clarity in landscape is his feeling for verbal clarity. Thought for Mr Wilbur is valuable insofar as it drags experience up into the light, and some of his poems vaunt the mastery of the intellect over its material:

> And has this simile a like perfection?
> The mind is like a bat. Precisely. Save

That in the very happiest intellection
A graceful error may correct the cave.

His metre is so perfect not only because he likes to show off his skill but also (perhaps this is the same reason in different words) because, like Marvell and Pope, he sees it as evidence of the sway of Reason. He values reason for the same thing as he values art, that it asserts man's mastery over the world. Writing of a Dutch painting, he puts this with irresistible naivety:

Consumed with greedy ire
Old Andrew Mellon glowered at this Dutch
Courtyard, until it bothered him so much
He bought the thing entire.

Writing of the new railway station at Rome, he is more sophisticated:

'What is our praise or pride
But to imagine excellence and try to make it?
What does it say over the door of Heaven
But *homo fecit*?'

This last subject, incidentally, is typical: several of his subjects are swaggeringly modern — one short poem is a mere excuse for a simile of 'when the highway bridgegates fall.' In technique, on the other hand, Mr Wilbur is something of a traditionalist: he knows about everything that has happened in modern poetry, and he takes a wide range of models, but his modernism is a matter of having read some recent philosophy and keeping his eye open in the world he lives in. It is the less complex and less intellectual poems which might have been written in 1850:

The Pacha sank at last upon his knee
And saw his ancient enemy reared high
In mica dust upon a horse of bronze,
The sun carousing in his either eye.

A rationalist, in the way I am using the term, naturally runs the risk of mere epigrammatic neatness, pruning the disorderliness of experience into a narrow clarity. One of the things that saves Mr Wilbur is his taste for the baroque, in nature as well as in art. He can moralise over nature in what almost becomes a pastiche of the seventeenth century:

O false gemmation! Flashy fall!

— but his love of intricacy is equally worthy of that century, and the moral he draws from the *Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa Sciarra* follows the convolutions of its subject with fascinated suggestiveness. His feeling for baroque is not precious, for it involves a love of energy: and I must qualify what I said of his admiration for reason by adding that he is completely aware of the darker and deeper sources of human power. He is a humanist poet who is not glib; and perhaps the finest poem in the book is the terrifying vision of what man does to the world by his aspirations, called *Beasts*. I should end by referring to this poem because of its tremendous power: for I am conscious of having chosen to talk about the poems that offer themselves for comment, rather than the best ones. *Beasts* tells of man disturbing the mysterious harmony of

nature — a harmony that itself (the poem never *says* this) may only be there because perceived by man. I should like to quote it all, but will just give a few lines of the marvellous central image of the werewolf:

Turning his head away
On the sweaty bolster, he tries to remember
The mood of manhood,

But lies at last, as always,
Letting it happen, the fierce fur soft to his face,
Hearing with sharper ears the wind's exciting minors,
The leaves' panic, and the degradation
Of the heavy streams.

L. D. Lerner

NEW BROOM

A Case of Samples — Poems 1946-1956, Kingsley Amis. (Gollancz, 15/-.)

THE title of this volume (it comes in fact from the last line of 'A Song of Experience') suggests that Kingsley Amis invites us to see him as a sort of commercial traveller in verse. It hints at the nature of this selection of poems, and at the kind of attitude the poet maintains towards them and the business of writing them.

Samples they are, to begin with, for the selection has been rigorous: the forty-five poems cover a period of ten years and include all but three of the ones previously published in the Reading University volume of 1953, *A Frame of Mind.* There is plenty of variety, though the case certainly does not bulge; and it might well have been lightened even further by the omission of one or two duds — 'A Poet's Epitaph', for example, is not worth its place. But by and large we get fair value for money.

To recognise in Mr Amis a twentieth-century Autolycus is to acknowledge the complete absence from his work of the bardic strain. He never takes himself solemnly *qua* poet — which is not to say that he does not take the writing of poetry very seriously. He knows just what he is doing, and why. Poems such as 'Against Romanticism' and 'Here is Where' only say out straight what is implicit in all the best poems here: that phoney language means phoney thoughts and feelings. The clever pastiche of 'Beowulf' (a nice little exposé, incidentally, of the prevailing misdirection of Old English studies) shows in an obvious way Mr Amis's historical sense of language as a thing which changes — and must sometimes be changed on purpose if it is to say what is meant here and now. A loudspeaker is required, not an echo-chamber.

The colloquial tone of Mr Amis's verse reflects his intention to say what he has to say loud and clear. If at this point the commercial traveller sometimes sticks a moralizing foot too far inside the door, better

that than hand-washing sales talk which leaves the reader wondering whether the poet is being serious or not, while the poet slips away down a cast-irony fire-escape.

Mr Amis is often funny, and some of the funniest poems here are some of the most serious and best). Funny but critical (like *Lucky Jim*), these poems will not be liked so much by those who hold precious the ideas at which the raspberries are blown and the snooks cocked; but, provided the attacks are justified, this marks their success. The real danger of this sort of writing is that the supporting audience on which the success of the raspberry depends may be taken too much for granted. It must be worked for. Hence the failure of a poem such as 'Mightier than the Pen', in which Balbus is destroyed before he is created, and the reader's antagonism becomes directed not at him but at the frantically gesticulating poet (whose echoing of Pope's lines in this context emphasises the inferiority of his own).

Fortunately, Mr Amis seldom loses his touch to such a degree. In 'A Dream of Fair Women',

> the other men retire
> Insulted, gestured at

— and we can guess what the gesture is, and we like it. The erotic fantasy is funny from the start, and the poet is part of the joke. His hat, which the visionary beauties fight to remove, is surely the same silly one which he is not sorry to see drop-kicked under a steamroller at the end of 'Creeper'.

> 'Me first, Kingsley; I'm cleverest' each declares

— and their cunning appeal to Mr Amis's intelligence adds another nice touch to his mock-dignified self-portrait. Perhaps it is because this part is so well done that the validity of the poem's twist-ending seems suspect. To sleep in seven-league boots is all very well, but surely 'love's ordinary distances' deserve a little more effort? Of course, Mr Amis doesn't say that we weaklings *should* give up the waking effort, but that we *do*. Fair enough; but the vigour of the first part of the poem, which drops away when the dream finishes, conveys the other suggestion.

The technique of putting forward a case and then turning it on its head, often used by Mr Amis, is more successful elsewhere. In 'Nocturne', one of the not-funny poems,

> Two people with nowhere to go fondle each other,
> Writhe slowly in the entrance to a shop

and the word *writhe* provokes a faint disgust — faint enough for us to be able to dismiss it later and consider the Watch Committee's judgment wide of the mark.

A robust, sensitive, witty intelligence is evident throughout this selection. Non-U it may be, in spite of the odd scholarly reference, but it is healthy and likeable. Prize-giving is rendered difficult by the consistency of achievement in the dozen or fifteen poems which might be short-listed, and this fact is suggestive. Mr Amis's verse soars to no great peaks and is not markedly original in what it says (though the tone is individual enough); but it is an excellent example of a type of poetry

which is becoming increasingly significant just now: poetry written, from time to time, by people who are not first and foremost poets but who have developed a form which enables them to make concise and accurate comments — a new kind of occasional verse. It is taking the place previously held by the essay, which form itself supplanted the occasional verse before it. The new verse strikes no poses (except sometimes the pose of striking no poses); it waves no flags; in attempting honesty it is sometimes obvious, and sometimes it is knocked silly by the recoil of its own guns; but at its best (as in *A Case of Samples*) it is lively, un-illusioned, perceptive and clear-spoken. Perhaps Mr Amis sees himself as selling brushes. Certainly his verse sweeps refreshingly clean.

THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

A Mortal Pitch, Vernon Scannell. (Villiers Publications, 7/6.)
Devil, Maggot, and Son, Christopher Logue. (Peter Russell, 12/6.)
Uncertainties, and Other Poems, John Press. (O.U.P., 10/6.)

It is sometimes useful to remind ourselves of the simpler aspects of things normally regarded as complicated. Take, for instance, the writing of a poem. It consists of three stages: the first is when a man becomes obsessed with an emotional concept to such a degree that he is compelled to do something about it. What he does is the second stage, namely, construct a verbal device that will reproduce this emotional concept in anyone who cares to read it, anywhere, any time. The third stage is the recurrent situation of people in different times and places setting off the device and re-creating in themselves what the poet felt when he wrote it. The stages are interdependent and all necessary. If there has been no preliminary feeling, the device has nothing to reproduce and the reader will experience nothing. If the second stage has not been well done, the device will not deliver the goods, or will deliver only a few goods to a few people, or will stop delivering them after an absurdly short while. And if there is no third stage, no successful reading, the poem can hardly be said to exist in a practical sense at all.

What a description of this basic tripartite structure shows is that poetry is emotional in nature and theatrical in operation, a skilled re-creation of emotion in other people, and that, conversely, a bad poem is one that never succeeds in doing this. All modes of critical derogation are no more than different ways of saying this, whatever literary, philosophical or moral terminology they employ, and it would not be necessary to point out anything so obvious if present-day poetry did not suggest that it had been forgotten. We seem to be producing a new kind of bad poetry, not the old kind that tries to move the reader and fails, but one that does not even try. Repeatedly he is confronted with pieces that cannot be understood without reference beyond their own limits or whose contented insipidity argues that their authors are merely reminding themselves of what they know already, rather than re-creating it for a third

party. The reader, in fact, seems no longer present in the poet's mind as he used to be, as someone who must understand and enjoy the finished product if it is to be a success at all; the assumption now is that no one will read it, and wouldn't understand or enjoy it if they did. Why should this be so? It is not sufficient to say that poetry has lost its audience, and so need no longer consider it: lots of people still read and even buy poetry. More accurately, poetry has lost its old audience, and gained a new one. This has been caused by the consequences of a cunning merger between poet, literary critic and academic critic (three classes now notoriously indistinguishable): it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the poet has gained the happy position wherein he can praise his own poetry in the press and explain it in the class-room, and the reader has been bullied into giving up the consumer's power to say *I don't like this, bring me something different.* Let him now so much as breathe a word about not liking a poem, and he is in the dock before he can say Edwin Arlington Robinson. And the charge is a grave one: flabby sensibility, insuffiicent or inadequate critical tools, and inability to meet new verbal and emotional situations. Verdict: guilty, plus a few riders on the prisoner's mental upbringing, addiction to mass amusements, and enfeebled responses. It is time some of you playboys realised, says the judge, that reading a poem is hard work. Fourteen days in stir. Next case.

The cash customers of poetry, therefore, who used to put down their money in the sure and certain hope of enjoyment as if at a theatre or concert-hall, were quick to move elsewhere. Poetry was no longer a pleasure. They have been replaced by a humbler squad, whose aim is not pleasure but self-improvement, and who have uncritically accepted the contention that they cannot appreciate poetry without preliminary investment in the intellectual equipment which, by the merest chance, their tutor happens to have about him. In short, the modern poetic audience, when it is not taking in its own washing, is a *student* audience, pure and simple. At first sight this may not seem a bad thing. The poet has at last a moral ascendancy, and his new *clientèle* not only pay for the poetry but pay to have it explained afterwards. Again, if the poet has only himself to please, he is no longer handicapped by the limitations of his audience. And in any case nobody nowadays believes that a worthwhile artist can rely on anything but his own judgment: public taste is always twenty-five years behind, and picks up a style only when it is exploited by the second-rate. All this is true enough. But at bottom poetry, like all art, is inextricably bound up with giving pleasure, and if a poet loses his pleasure-seeking audience he has lost the only audience worth having, for which the dutiful mob that signs on every September is no substitute. And the effect will be felt throughout his work. He will forget that even if he finds what he has to say interesting, others may not. He will concentrate on moral worth or semantic intricacy. Worst of all, his poems will no longer be born of the tension between what he non-verbally feels and what can be got over in common word-usage to someone who hasn't had his experience or education or travel-grant, and once the other

end of the rope is dropped what results will not be so much obscure or piffling (though it may be both) as an unrealised, 'undramatised' slackness, because he will have lost the habit of testing what he writes by this particular standard. Hence, no pleasure. Hence, no poetry.

What can be done about this? Who wants anything done about it? Certainly not the poet, who is in the unprecedented position of peddling both his work and the standard by which it is judged. Certainly not the new reader, who, like a partner of some unconsummated marriage, has no idea of anything better. Certainly not the old reader, who has simply replaced one pleasure with another. Only the romantic loiterer who recalls the days when poetry was condemned as sinful might wish things different. But if the medium is in fact to be rescued from among our duties and restored to our pleasures, I can only think that a large-scale revulsion has got to set in against present notions, and that it will have to start with poetry-readers asking themselves more frequently whether they do in fact enjoy what they read, and, if not, what the point is of carrying on. And I use enjoy in the commonest of senses, the sense in which we leave a radio on or off. Those interested might like to read David Daiches' essay *The New Criticism: some qualifications* (in *Literary Essays*, 1956); in the meantime, the following note by Samuel Butler may re-awaken a furtive itch for freedom: 'I should like to like Schumann's music better than I do; I dare say I could make myself like it better if I tried; but I do not like having to try to make myself like things; I like things that make me like them at once and no trying at all.' (*Notebooks*, 1919.)

There is no connection except in the most general sense between the foregoing remarks and the three volumes under review. Mr Vernon Scannell's kind of poetry is the most congenial of them; it is forthright, understandable, well-observed and sardonic.

> At last they found accommodation in a cold
> Furnished room where they quickly learned to believe in ghosts;
> They had their hope stuffed and put on the mantelpiece
> But found, after a while, that they did not notice it.
>
> While she spends many hours looking in the bottoms of teacups
> He reads much about association football
> And waits for the marvellous envelope to fall:
> Their eyes are strangers and they rarely speak.
> They did not expect this.

Two Lessons in Grammar, though a little reminiscent of Mr Henry Reed, and *How to Fill in a Crossword Puzzle* are good ideas neatly worked out, and one welcomes the much-anthologised *Gunpowder Plot*:

> For days these curious cardboard buds have lain
> In brightly coloured boxes. Soon the night
> Will come. We pray there'll be no rain
> To make these magic orchids flame less bright.
>
> Now in the garden's darkness they begin

To flower: the frenzied whizz of Catherine-wheel
Puts forth its fiery petals and the thin
Rocket soars to burst upon the steel

Bulwark of a cloud. And then the guy,
Absurdly human phoenix, is again
Gulped by greedy flames . . .

Mr Scannell's weakness is the *cliché*, both intellectual and verbal. It is daunting to find a poem beginning *She is a whore, my muse,* and a poetry reading is something of a sitting target for satire at the best, which this isn't. But Mr Scannell has the right idea of poetry, and I should not like to scare him off into the false originalities of obscurity or cant.

I am afraid that this is precisely the territory to which readers of Mr Christopher Logue's attractively-produced book are at once transported. Only conscience drove me through the medievalism, the tortured syntax ('Than you can ever guess I am that distance / far from any point marked in the universe / of what will be if ifs were buts . . .'), the general pointless mystification, the lack of humour, the themes encored from W. B. Yeats, the words like King and Queen and Cain and Abel and Bethlehem and Calvary tolling like bell-buoys round the rocks of tedium. In the terms employed earlier, Mr Logue's devices fail every time. But, in fairness, here is a complete poem (one of the easier ones):

Any maid may sing this

And who will kiss my grown red lips?
and who will say,
and who will take my hand?
and who will say
be lorn no longer, lay thee beside me
this man or that, or woman.

when, and grown red, my lips for kisses try,
with who? And will,
and who will take this hand within their own,
say who? And will
I lie, forlorn beside my dreams no longer,
this man or that, or woman.

too red thy lips to lay forlorn beside
this man or that:
will they no longer take, who born must try
this man or woman:
and where and when and who and ever will
this man or woman take

my lips grown red for them
my life grown white for them
my lying down as one
This man or that, or woman.

It is as difficult to be nice as to be nasty about Mr Press. On the one hand it cannot be concealed that his poems are almost entirely devoid of flavour or impact, and therefore of interest and merit; on the other, the spirit that informs them is so reasonable, humane, and sympathetic that one finds oneself regarding him as an ally and friend. It is the verse of a man who has read, travelled and thought, but who has no facile solution to anything. Perhaps his approach is best summed up in the last three verses of *A Far Country*:

> But when the music fails and all the drear
> Harsh pain of living reappears once more,
> Who can believe that he has visited,
> Except in dreams, that luminous, far shore?
>
> For some have never seen that ocean, some,
> Encased in blindness, arrogantly boast,
> Behind their boundaries in the stifling air
> That they will never see that unmapped coast.
>
> But those possessed by rumours of that sea
> Who spend their lives in two worlds, wandering,
> With neither sure faith nor a firm despair,
> Find a strange beauty in their suffering.

This extract may go some way to show the character of his collection, and the regrettable way that all Mr Press's virtues go for nothing in the absence of a dominating originality.

Philip Larkin